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Spatial Mobility, Workers and Jobs: Perspectives from the Northern Ireland Experience

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ABSTRACT

How best to address local concentrations of worklessness is a key question for labour market, economic development and social inclusion policy. Historically, initiatives in Northern Ireland have focused on moving 'jobs to workers', but in changed political circumstances there is now greater emphasis on encouraging the movement of 'workers to jobs'. A review of the Northern Ireland experience in the context of broader consideration of the geography and socio-institutional structure of local labour markets sheds light on the difficulties and successes in implementing both approaches. It is concluded that both have a role to play because labour market space is simultaneously 'segmented' and 'seamless'.

Key words: local labour markets, policy approaches, social space, spatial mobility

JEL classifications: J61, J68, R23

La mobilité géographique, les travailleurs et l'emploi:
des perspectives provenant de l'expérience en Irlande du Nord.

Shuttleworth & Green

Une question-clé à propos du marché du travail, pour ce qui est du développement économique et quant à la politique en faveur de l'inclusion, c'est comment aborder le mieux les concentrations locales du chômage. Historiquement, les actions menées en Irlande du Nord ont porté sur le déplacement des 'emplois aux travailleurs', mais, étant donné l'évolution du milieu politique, on souligne de nos jours plutôt le déplacement des 'travailleurs aux emplois'. Une critique de l'expérience en Irlande du Nord dans le cadre d'une considération plus généralisée de la géographie et de la structure socio-institutionnelle des marchés du travail répandent de la lumière sur les difficultés et les réussites dans la mise en oeuvre des deux façons. On conclut que les deux façons ont chacune un rôle à jouer parce que la géographie du marché du travail est à la fois 'segmentée' et 'continue'.

Marchés du travail locaux / Façons politiques / Espace social / Mobilité géographique

Classement JEL: J61; J68; R23

Räumliche Mobilität, Arbeitnehmer und Arbeitsplätze: Perspektiven aus den Erfahrungen von Nordirland

Ian Shuttleworth and Anne E Green

ABSTRACT

Wie sich lokale Konzentrationen von Arbeitslosigkeit am besten beheben lassen, ist eine zentrale Frage für den Arbeitsmarkt, die Wirtschaftsentwicklung und die Politik zur sozialen Integration. In der Vergangenheit haben sich die Initiativen in Nordirland darauf konzentriert, die 'Arbeitsplätze zu den Arbeitnehmern' zu bringen, doch angesichts der veränderten politischen Umstände werden inzwischen stärker Maßnahmen betont, mit denen die 'Arbeitnehmer zu den Arbeitsplätzen' gebracht werden sollen. Eine Untersuchung der Erfahrungen von Nordirland im Kontext der breiteren Berücksichtigung der geografischen und sozioinstitutionellen Struktur der lokalen Arbeitsmärkte verdeutlicht die Schwierigkeiten und Erfolge bei der Umsetzung beider Ansätze. Unser Fazit lautet, dass beide Ansätze ihre Berechtigung haben, weil der lokale Arbeitsmarktraum gleichzeitig 'segmentiert' und 'nahtlos' ist.

Key words:
Lokale Arbeitsmärkte
Politische Ansätze
Sozialer Raum
Räumliche Mobilität
JEL classifications: J61, J68, R23

Movilidad espacial, trabajadores y puestos de trabajos: las perspectivas de la experiencia de Irlanda del Norte

Ian Shuttleworth and Anne E Green

ABSTRACT

Una de las cuestiones principales para el mercado laboral, el desarrollo económico y la política de inclusión social es cómo abordar mejor las concentraciones locales de desempleo. Las iniciativas en Irlanda del Norte se han centrado siempre en trasladar los ‘puestos de trabajo a los trabajadores’ pero ahora en circunstancias políticas de cambio se está prestando más atención a estimular el movimiento de los ‘trabajadores a los puestos de trabajo’. Un análisis de la experiencia de Irlanda del Norte, en el que se considera exhaustivamente la estructura geográfica y social de las instituciones de los mercados laborales locales, nos indica cuáles son las dificultades y los éxitos de poner en marcha estos dos planteamientos. Concluimos que ambos planteamientos desempeñan una función porque el espacio del mercado laboral está a la vez ‘segmentado’ y perfectamente integrado.

Key words:

Mercados laborales locales
Planteamientos políticos
Espacio social
Movilidad espacial

JEL classifications: J61, J68, R23

INTRODUCTION

Some elements of official UK thinking about labour market policy have downplayed geographical barriers to employment. Narrow interpretations of employability have few explicitly spatial elements since their focus is on supply-side interventions to provide training and personal skills to make benefit claimants work ready (HILLAGE and POLLARD 1998). One part of the rationale for a supply-side bias in labour market policy is the observation that areas with unfilled vacancies can coexist alongside locales with relatively high rates of unemployment (HOGARTH ET AL., 2003). The associated inference is that labour demand is less important. As the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, stated at the Birmingham Urban Summit of November 2002, "*too often there are workers without jobs side by side without jobs without workers.*" The official Treasury view in this case was clear: spatial concentrations of labour market disadvantage could not be explained by a local shortage of jobs.

However, the spatial mobility of workers and labour demand issues are increasingly seen by some labour market analysts and policy makers as key elements in matching prospective workers with unfilled vacancies. In 2003 the UK Secretary of State proposed that Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants should be expected to expand the geographical area over which

they look for work from 60 minutes to 90 minutes travel time. Broader notions of employability emphasise the role of the demand-side by stressing the need for accessible local jobs, as well as the spatial mobility of workers to travel to them, identifying them as important elements in the 'employability mix' (McQUAID and LINDSAY 2005). Spatial themes, involving employment location and worker mobility in the labour market, are therefore of key importance.

There is, however, some controversy in balancing the requirements for worker mobility against the need for local jobs. Arguably, some UK government views of the labour market have unjustly downplayed the significance of the demand side. Powerful critiques of UK labour market policy, for instance, argue that shortages of locally-accessible work are the major problem faced by jobseekers (FOTHERGILL and GRIEVE SMITH 2005; TUROK and EDGE 1999; WEBSTER 2006) and that there is need for local job creation. Furthermore, the futility of increasing levels of training (and compulsion) in the absence of local job opportunities has been illustrated by SUNLEY ET AL. (2001). The need for spatially-accessible employment is increased by the numerous geographical barriers to employment faced by benefit claimants and socially-disadvantaged people. These groups are amongst the least spatially-mobile members of society (SHUTTLEWORTH and LLOYD, 2005; GREEN and OWEN, 2006; SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT, 2004). The barriers they face include such obstacles as spatially-limited mental maps (QUINN, 1986) as well as more familiar physical barriers such as lacking a car and inadequate public transport (LUCAS, 2004).

But there are also counter reasons for encouraging the spatial mobility of workers. GORDON (1999; 2003) argues that employers do not just seek workers from their local area

and that they may be reluctant to train locals when there are experienced outsiders; and that 'work to the workers policies' fail when these jobs are lost and communities are left stranded. Policies that provide job opportunities close to home may also do little to discourage localism when it is arguable that the interests of jobless people are better served by accessing a wider range of employment opportunities over a greater geographical area (McGREGOR and McCONNACHIE, 1995; GREEN and WHITE, 2007) rather than being restricted to their immediate neighbourhood. Additionally, there are the well-known problems of the 'spatial leakage' of jobs from the areas which are supposedly being targeted by local job creation (HAUGHTON 1990). Debates about the relative importance of increasing local labour demand as compared with the possibilities for encouraging greater worker mobility are therefore ongoing. As MORRISON (2005, 2279) comments, "Both claim empirical support and, after a brief period of confrontation, they continue to exist today giving quite conflicting signals to policymakers".

The reasons why there are 'conflicting signals' are explored in this paper with reference to the Northern Ireland (NI) experience of bringing employment to socially-deprived communities as well as encouraging the spatial mobility of workers in the labour market. NI offers a useful perspective from which to make this exploration on two counts. First, in the past, it has moved further along the path of implementing policies with a strong demand-side emphasis at a local scale, through the location of jobs created by inward investment in or near concentrations of joblessness (OSBORNE, 1996) than elsewhere in the UK. Secondly, for a variety of internal and external reasons, it has recently moved some way along the policy continuum towards England, Wales and Scotland in seeking to place greater emphasis on the promotion of the spatial mobility of benefit claimants and workers in order to encourage them to compete for jobs within commuting reach. In doing so, it faces the same problems of

Comment [AEG1]: Ian – this tries to go some way towards the first minor weakness highlighted by referee 1 – i.e. that 'workers to jobs' places emphasis on the importance of labour demand in explaining worklessness. However, I think we need to be more explicit in the text about answering the referee's point.

immobility that are seen elsewhere along with the added legacy of communal division and associated violence between Catholics and Protestants. The experience of demand-side policies in NI therefore can throw some light on the strengths and weaknesses of the types of measures that have been advocated in Great Britain (GB) and elsewhere. The current moves towards encouraging spatial mobility in NI are interesting in themselves as they occur in a post-ceasefire (but perhaps not post-conflict) society, but more broadly they illustrate in a starker form the issues and problems faced elsewhere in achieving similar aims.

Comment [AEG2]: Ian – perhaps this is the place to make the point – highlighted in the comments from the editors and also the first minor weakness identified by referee 1 that (at national level [claim of editors] extreme supply-side explanations exist that virtually ignore the demand for labour and consequently prescribe non-spatial policies such as labour market activation and skills enhancement. (We can also make the point that the policies and initiatives we consider also recognise the importance of labour market activation and skills enhancement.)

The next section provides further background on the evolution of the labour market policy position in NI, highlighting differences in emphasis from prevailing approaches in the rest of the UK and the USA. The paper then explores the NI experience and limitations of bringing jobs to workers, drawing together primary evidence from recruitment case studies at a variety of sites in NI; interviews with labour market policymakers; and interviews with residents of socially-deprived areas. The focus is on the extent to which the jobless gained work; the heterogeneity of employer recruitment experiences; the spatial scale over which supply and demand are matched; the need for special initiatives to encourage the local take-up of jobs created through spatially-targeted employment policies; and the strengths and weaknesses of this type of policy as applied in NI. This is followed by consideration of the emergent emphasis on encouraging spatial mobility in the NI labour market and presentation of evidence on the opportunities and constraints faced in attempts to move workers to jobs. Specific issues explored include the programmes introduced (or planned) in NI; the relative importance of 'sectarian' and 'non-sectarian' factors in labour market spatial mobility; and assumptions about spatial mobility in a 'post-conflict society'. Finally, the benefits and costs of each of these broad approaches are assessed.

SPATIAL MOBILITY AND POLICY IN NI: AN OVERVIEW

Elements of labour market policy in NI with regard to the spatial mobility of jobs and workers differ from those observed in the rest of the UK as a consequence of two inter-related factors: NI's considerable administrative autonomy in the UK and the political and social context of communal division and violence (OSBORNE, 1996). Local discretion has made it possible for NI to diverge from UK norms; and communal division to some extent has made this divergence necessary. A major assumption that has historically shaped labour market and social policy is that residential segregation and communal conflict have restricted the opportunities for workers to be spatially mobile on a daily basis as they journey from home to work. Fear of travelling in or working in an area dominated by the 'other' mean that for some workers in some places there are spatial restrictions on job search and mobility because of the 'chill factor' (SMITH and CHAMBERS, 1991; SHEEHAN and TOMLINSON, 1999; SHIRLOW and MURTAGH, 2006).

As a consequence of this the emphasis in NI has been on locating jobs and services in or near local communities where they can be safely accessed without crossing communal divisions. The Targeting Social Need (TSN) strategy, introduced in 1991, its 1998 successor New TSN, and the current Anti-Poverty Strategy are important elements by which geographically-targeted employment policies have been introduced in NI encouraging the location of jobs in or near areas of social need. Officially, these policies are shaped by 'objective' social need but at some (often unspoken) level they are also about conflict management in a divided society. The political environment of NI offers particular incentives (and problems) for spatially-targeted employment creation. Not only was it recognised that it was 'foolhardy' to encourage the spatial mobility of workers but there was also political kudos for local political

representatives in bringing jobs to their areas in what is often seen as a 'zero-sum' employment game. If a policy continuum is imagined with pure supply-side measures at one end and demand-side programmes at the other, then NI has historically been much further towards the demand-side end than either GB or the USA. However, a combination of external and internal forces is now moving NI back along this continuum towards GB and the USA.

Externally, the UK labour market policy environment has shaped the context for recent labour market policy in NI; the JSA requirement for increased mobility has recently been actively considered in NI, for instance; New Deal has been rolled out in NI as in other parts of the UK; employability has formed a key principle in NI labour market policy since 1997; and joint Jobs and Benefit Offices have been created in NI as elsewhere. Particularly relevant because of their role in promoting spatial mobility are Targeted Initiatives (TIs). Coming out of the NI Long-Term Unemployment and Employability Workforce, TIs were designed to help those who were farthest from the labour market by increasing economic activity and employment rates, and reducing benefit dependency. Following GB precedent by introducing these programmes in NI was made more 'thinkable', by changed political and economic circumstances. In particular, the ceasefires of the 1990s and the assumed (by some) lessening in community tension meant that worker mobility was more feasible; and the drying up of manufacturing investment that could be located in deprived areas at the expense of market-oriented investment in sectors like retailing made worker mobility perhaps more necessary.

THE NI EXPERIENCE OF SPATIAL TARGETING ON EMPLOYMENT: SUCCESSES AND LIMITATIONS OF BRINGING JOBS TO THE WORKERS

NI has moved much further than other parts of the UK towards policies that bring jobs to workers by new start-ups and company expansions in or near socially-deprived areas. In targeting social need, jobs under the various TSN initiatives in the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century, were placed in close spatial proximity to deprived areas in the expectation that deprived people would benefit from these opportunities.

It is worthwhile to reflect on the foundations and implications of this programme, which reached out across many branches of government although the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Industrial Development Board (IDB – responsible for inward investment) were leading players. First, implicitly, it accepts the pre-existing territorial 'containers' into which social space in NI is divided. Secondly, it is based on a rather limited understanding of space and the geography of labour markets. It initially assumed that because jobs are physically close to deprived areas in geometric space that they are 'accessible'; so ignoring the literature on perceptual space which suggests that although jobs might be physically nearby they could be very distant (and unknown because of this distance) in social space (QUINN, 1986; GREEN ET AL., 2005) as well as the extensive literature on physical barriers to employment (eg SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT, 2003). Nevertheless, in recognising the need for accessible employment, NI implicitly took a wider view of employability than was apparent in narrow supply-side conceptions elsewhere in the UK and adopted some local demand-side solutions.

NI provides an interesting example to assess the results of this policy because of the existence of a dataset of a type which is rarely found elsewhere. This is the Large-Scale Recruitment Study (LRS) that had the aim of examining recruitment experiences at new employment start-

ups or expansions which had been sponsored by government. Running between 1996 and 2001, the LRS collected data on 15,000 applicants and appointees from company records at employment sites across NI, providing information on home postcode, previous economic status, age, gender, and educational qualifications; (that this information was available was at least in part a function of the political situation in NI where the monitoring of workforce compositions is a requirement of equality legislation [OSBORNE and SHUTTLEWORTH, 2004]).

The objectives of the study, its design, and its planned outcomes are interesting as context in so far as they reveal the background to policymaking and the problems of implementing spatial employment policies as well as measuring their impact. One context for the LRS was the *post facto* monitoring of the effectiveness of geographical targeting. The working assumption that had been made by NI policymakers was that bringing jobs to areas meant bringing jobs to people living in those areas, but this had been made in the absence of empirical information to evaluate the strength of this assumption. The second context for the LRS was to provide information that could be used to formulate future policy. It was hoped that by providing information on employers in different types of location (eg large cities, small towns, rural areas) and in different industrial sectors (eg textiles, engineering, services) that it would prove possible to create a 'cookbook' of scenarios by which previous knowledge of employment impacts might help in estimating the possible impact of new employment growth. For example, if it could be shown that new hotel jobs went mainly to jobless people who lived in close proximity to the employment site, then this evidence could be used to make the case that a similar employer might be expected to have a similar impact. What, then, do the results of the LRS show and what can they say about the problems of implementing and measuring policies that spatially target employment?

Table 1 presents summary information for the 24 employment sites for which there was information recorded on previous economic status. Column 4 shows the percentage of employees at each established who were previously jobless. There is a wide variation in the proportions of jobless in the workforces ranging from nearly 68% – Site 2 – to around 5% at Site 24. Recruitment experiences in terms of the employment of the previously jobless are therefore highly heterogeneous. Columns 1, 2 and 3 provide information on the locational context of the sites, their industrial sector, and the types of jobs on offer in an attempt to explore the sources of this variation. Establishments with many higher-grade occupations (eg sites 22 and 17) tended to recruit fewer jobless people. However, there are still considerable variations between sites of the same broad kind (eg within engineering) or employing the same types of workers (eg operatives [SOC 8]) and there is by no means a close correspondence between the percentage previously jobless and employer and job type.

All employment locations included in Table 1 were in areas of social need. Following the rationale of locating jobs in these areas, it would be reasonable to expect that sites in areas of higher joblessness could be expected to reflect this local social composition by employing higher numbers of workers from this economic status. Columns 5 and 6 provide information from the 2001 Census on the proportion of the population aged 16-74 who were unemployed or economically inactive in (a) the ward where the employment site was located (Column 5) and (b) within the site catchment as defined by the mean commuting distance of workers employed at each site (Column 6). Again, there is no clear relationship between these contextual measures and the proportion of jobless people employed per site; in some cases this exceeds the rate in the neighbourhood and in other cases it is less. Statistical analysis shows that these relationships are effectively random; correlation analysis gives an R^2 of 0.06

for percentage jobless per ward and an R^2 of 0.04 for the relationship between percentage jobless per site catchment and percentage jobless per workforce.

So what are the implications of these observations? In general, they suggest that hopes for a 'cookbook' of rules about employment location and their socio-spatial impact were unrealistic. The heterogeneity observed indicates that there is no simple recipe to predict the distribution of jobs and policymakers can be 'flying blind'. Perhaps the expectation of a 'cookbook' founders on the diversity of local labour markets with place-specific combinations of institutional and social configurations (PECK, 1996) which influence the relationships of employers with communities. In practice this means there are possibly a variety of physical and perceptual obstacles to employment which differ between places, suggesting that whilst it might be *necessary* to place jobs in or near deprived areas but seldom *sufficient*. Further obstacles to sustainable employment arise from difficulties in employee retention even when workers from deprived areas gain jobs. An example of this was provided at Site 20, located in close proximity to a deprived housing estate:

> "*They want jobs, they come for interviews, we give them jobs, but they maybe last two days and decide not to come back or not to turn in, so their attitude to working is not positive*" (personnel manager, Site 20).

Indeed, the experience of NI indicates that not only do recruitment practices have to be tailored to each location and to each employment situation if the aim is to attract local deprived or jobless people but that care must be taken in promoting worker retention as part of a wider employability package. There are generic lessons about practices such as 'outreach', help with transport and flexibility in recruitment practices. For example, a case

study of Days Hotel, (McKINSTRY, 2003) on a derelict site adjacent to a high unemployment area, underlined the importance of a tailored employability package, pre-recruitment support, a localised interview process (held by the employer within a local community centre) and an *ad hoc* informal advice service providing in-work support but, as in the case of a similar employer (Site 20), measures of this kind do not always work. The specifics of implementation must be altered in different locations. In some situations, for example a large call centre start-up, help was provided with transport – a point we return to later.

Comment [AEG3]: Ian – do we need to give some recognition to the fact that these observations are not unique to NI?

There is a danger of 'throwing the baby out with the bath water' by dismissing spatial employment targeting because of problems in implementation in the context of local labour market diversity. However, the fact that jobless people have gained work who presumably would have remained workless in the absence of the jobs at the sites could be counted a success. But precise answers to the questions of 'how much' and 'what kind' of a success are elusive. We have already seen that more jobless people gain work at some employers in some locations than in others. To this might be added the problem of the definition of an appropriate spatial measurewhich can help to estimate whether more or less jobless people than 'expected' gain work. We have considered both the characteristics of the ward in which the employment site is located and a broader catchment measure based on the mean commuting distance to each site. Neither, however, appeared to have much relationship to workforce composition, and there are major questions about the spatial scale used to devise and measure the effectiveness of this and similar initiatives. Employer catchments are localised; and the perceptual horizons of the jobless tend to be spatially restricted. This implies that the appropriate geography for these programmes is far smaller than the Travel-to-Work-Area (TTWA) as labour supply and demand is matched over relatively short

distances. However, how short is 'short'? In practice, it varies markedly by employer and locational context so there is no easy answer to the question of geographical scale.

Recruitment is a selective process and to assume, therefore, that a workforce should match the characteristics of a spatial catchment is to run the risk of the ecological fallacy, but there are further problems when labour sheds are very spatially variable (see Column 7 of Table 1). Coupled with the spatial leakage of jobs beyond the immediate locales of employment sites (McGREGOR and McCONNACHIE, 1995; MORRISON, 2005) it means that it is often very difficult for policymakers to know who they are targeting in what places since the LRS shows that employment catchments are highly spatially variable. This official realisation has contributed in part to a decreased emphasis on spatial employment targeting in NI (bringing jobs to workers) and to the recent increased interest in promoting the spatial mobility of workers to jobs. However, other factors have also driven this change, and these are explored below alongside other issues associated with the spatial mobility of workers.

BRINGING WORKERS TO JOBS IN NI: PROSPECTS AND OBSTACLES

NI is now moving along the policy continuum towards the positions of GB and the USA in encouraging benefit claimants and workers to be spatially mobile so they can access a wider range of employment opportunities. Because there was less experience of these issues in NI research was commissioned by DEL to investigate the background to worker mobility in NI and elsewhere. The discussion in this section, and in the conclusion, draws on seven interviews undertaken with civil servants and labour market actors as part of this research, a desk-based review of mobility initiatives in GB and the USA, and some fifty interviews with residents of deprived areas in Belfast. The objectives were to examine the drivers of change;

Comment [AEG4]: Ian – possibly worth referencing our report to DEL or the associated Bulletin article here.

to map out measures impinging on mobility in the labour market across government; and to explore policy initiatives in GB and the USA with the hope of transferring them to NI. The research took place just as this shift in policy was emerging and so can offer insights into the genesis of this development as well as the process of policy transfer from other areas. In discussing the shift away from bringing jobs to workers to promoting the spatial mobility of workers to jobs, the interviews with senior civil servants and labour market actors indicated that the main driving factors included perceptions of change in the NI labour market; changing UK labour market and welfare policy contexts; and post-ceasefire 'normalisation' of NI society.

In the view of policy makers the NI labour market was undergoing a number of major changes that limited the feasibility of spatial employment targeting. One issue, identified by a representative of DEL, was that new jobs brought to NI in sectors such as services and construction could not always be located in deprived neighbourhoods and so workers would have to move to them. This point was echoed elsewhere in government; it was acknowledged that while the location of manufacturing jobs in deprived areas had declined, it had always been:

> "*largely symbolic as many flagship employers did not employ locals or folded quickly*" (Department for Social Development official).

New marketed-oriented retail developments demand worker mobility, as exemplified by the Victoria Square retail redevelopment in central Belfast. This was expected to create 3,000 jobs in construction and services which could not be brought spatially to jobless people in deprived areas.

Comment [AEG5]: Ian – In this paragraph a short (no more than a sentence) of what DEL, DSD and OFMDFM (mentioned later) responsibilities are could be given.

A second theme under the heading of labour market change was pessimism about the perceived decrease in the quantity of foreign direct investment into NI:

> "*It would be unreasonable to assume that there could be sufficient investment in neighbourhoods for sustained employment growth*" (trades union representative).

It was also argued by a DEL representative that community organisations and politicians increasingly voiced (unspoken publicly) serious doubts about whether sufficient jobs could be brought to deprived areas and so realised that worker spatial mobility to jobs would have to move up the agenda. There is some evidence that these trends are real and not just a result of mistaken perceptions. Official data[1] on inward investment to the UK and to NI shows that manufacturing investment has tended to decline whereas service investment has remained relatively steady and in cases such as growing sectors such as retail it is perceived to be market oriented. Empirically, these points echo MORRISON (2005) who argues that unskilled labour may face a new spatially-dispersed geography of employment.

These perceived labour market changes are reinforced by developments in UK-wide labour market and welfare policy. A Jobcentre Plus official commented that in the past the mobility criteria for benefit payments – such as those for JSA – had been ignored or enforced less strictly in NI than in the rest of the UK whilst another from the Office of the First/Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (with responsibility for community relations) stated that the history of violence had led to worker mobility (and indeed mobility in general) being downplayed. However, the advent of employability as a key part post-1997 labour market

[1] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D6018.xls (accessed 16/1/07)

policy had altered the context for NI. The NI Employability Taskforce raised spatial mobility in the labour market as an issue; and the merging of employment and benefit offices as part of a drive to get claimants into work had increased the pressure for spatial mobility.

This greater openness to policy trends from the rest of the UK was only imaginable for policymakers in the circumstances of political settlement and the various paramilitary ceasefires of the 1990s:

> "*The decade-long ceasefire means that some workers are willing and able to move around the city and more widely in NI*" (OFMDFM official).

Together with comments from a DEL official that the "*lessening of violence*" was a major factor shaping recent developments and the sentiment that we now live in "*normalised society*", these developments appear to have significantly shaped the context for spatial mobility in the labour market in NI since 2000. This combination of labour market change, UK policy reform, and internal NI political developments provides a strong rationale for a move from spatial employment targeting on deprived areas towards a mix of measures more like those in the rest of the UK. But, as indicated below, it is difficult to promote spatial mobility for workers in NI.

Spatial mobility is a 'difficult' issue for a number of reasons. Even in a 'narrow' sense of promoting physical access to jobs (for example through improvements in public transport) spatial mobility crosscuts several policy domains of government ranging from employment to local transport. In a wider sense of overcoming physical and perceptual barriers, action to

promote spatial mobility might involve education, training, the careers service, transport policy, and planning policy. As such, there is a theoretical case for 'joined up government' but in practice there are substantial difficulties in coordinating cross-departmental action. These problems were magnified in NI by the comparative novelty of the move towards promoting spatial mobility. NI policymakers also recognised there remained substantial barriers to mobility. Physical barriers could be overcome in some cases by providing transport services, for instance, but mental/perceptual obstacles were far more difficult to break down. Despite the argument that NI had become 'normalised' it was also recognised that localism and fear still tied people to their areas:

> "*There is a tremendous amount of inertia in the system; politicians, civil servants, and government agencies still see NI as a very localised society and it is hard to overcome this without real political change at the top*" (DEL official).

Comment [AEG6]: Ian - This might not be the right attribution, but it shows how I think the text should be presented.

It was unclear how far this immobility was seen as a result of sectarian fear and how far as a result of so-called 'normal' factors. There was a realisation that some marginalised groups could have a contemporary experience of fear but, echoing GREEN ET AL (2005), several respondents argued that fear was hard to conceptualise and measure. As in cities in GB, there were analogous issues of a lack of 'spatial confidence' and localisms created by limited mobility experiences. Hence, in NI policy has to deal with a mix of real sectarian fear, 'lack of confidence' and 'fear' as a *post hoc* justification for avoiding unwelcome choices. This background means that policymakers must work in a complex environment. Elements of NI social policy officially encourage integration and spatial mobility in the labour market is a part of this. However there was a fear on the part of policymakers that locating jobs and

facilities so that people would be forced to travel to them could lead to a fall in uptake if spatial immobility persisted.

Comment [AEG7]: Ian – I think this is where the point of referee 1 about TTWA-scale policies could be discussed. In NI, it could be argued, that TTWA applications have been overlooked because of the more localised geography of communal division. It may become more thinkable to apply a policy at TTWA scale in the future. We need to distinguish between: (1) the theoretical implications of a TTWA level application (but are there too few difference in LM conditions between TTWAs in NI for this to be 'viable') and (2) the application of policy at TTWA scale in practice (taking account of communal divisions and the point raised above).

The importance of context and complexity in understanding the barriers to spatial mobility in NI is reinforced by interviews with residents of deprived areas of Belfast about their perceptions of the labour market. For some residents, fear of violence (either contemporary or historic) remains something that shapes spatial mobility patterns:

"*Nationalists and republicans would see themselves safe in West Belfast and again wouldn't perceive themselves to be safe in the East Belfast"* with the result that *"a lot of young people wouldn't work in what is perceived as the sort of East Belfast area in general*" (Catholic male, West Belfast, mid forties).

However, some interviewees identified that fear had decreased:

> "*I think years ago, before all this development in Laganside, people would have been afraid to use the Queen's Bridge* [a major route from East Belfast to the city centre] *but that's long gone years now*" (Catholic woman, late thirties, East Belfast).

New employment sites were considered by some of the policymaker respondents to offer better prospects for neutral fear-free space because they quite literally did not have a history of violence.: But there are continued obstacles to mobility and perhaps some mismatch between some of the most optimistic visions of policymakers for 'new' employment sites (such as the central riverside area of Laganside) which offered the prospect for neutral fear-

free space on the basis that, quite literally, they did not have a history of violence, and the reality of post-ceasefire mobility on the ground.

However, as hinted above, obstacles to getting people into work are not solely related to fear. In Belfast there is some evidence of an unwillingness to travel, for reasons which appear to be non-sectarian, and which are echoed in some British cities (see GREEN and WHITE, 2007):

> "*For young men what I have found is mobility – say there's a bus picking you up at the front door and dropping you off at the front door – young men, they're hard to move*" and referring to a company and government agency which arranged transport to training and to its site "*they were actually willing to put a bus on that would go to the Albertbridge Road and the Newtownards Road, drop them up to Mallusk* [a peripheral industrial estate] *and bring them back…We couldn't get anybody to go*" (Protestant community leader, East Belfast).

The community worker believed that a significant problem was limited perceptual horizons in that Mallusk was seen as too far away – something he deemed a "*very feeble excuse*", whereas if the jobs had been in East Belfast "*you would have to beat them off with a stick*" – an argument for local employment creation, as discussed earlier.

Physical accessibility and particularly ownership of a car was identified as an issue by several respondents:

"*If you don't drive a car then you have to use public transport*" (Protestant male, late forties, East Belfast).

But this could prove restrictive given the flexible hours demanded by some jobs and the location of employment which means that to travel to some employment sites could mean two or more buses. That being so it is no wonder that there was recognition that:

"*Mobility is a big issue and having a car, it changes the whole geography of the city*" (Protestant male, late thirties, East Belfast).

A number of forces are pushing therefore in the direction of greater spatial mobility for workers. However, it has been shown that the prospects for this mobility are somewhat limited. Fears arising from communal conflict have not completely vanished despite the paramilitary ceasefires. These fears are compounded with localism arising from other causes; and there are also physical barriers to movement relating to access to transport. From the perspective of government, worker mobility is a tricky issue – even if dealing with just physical barriers there is a requirement for cross-departmental action, and this multiplies rapidly if the remit for action is expanded to include perceptual barriers. Despite this, policymakers assert that spatial mobility is moving up the NI agenda.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

The promotion of work-related mobility appears a difficult issue in NI; and bringing jobs to communities can be also seen to be problematic in its own right given the NI experience. Perceptual barriers to mobility seem hard to surmount whilst the impact of the spatial

targeting of employment varies from place to place. It therefore seems that there are no readymade labour market panaceas that can improve the position of jobless people and socially-deprived areas. However, there are some general tendencies that can be extracted from the discussion and guidance can be offered on some policy questions. This being so, what lessons can NI learn from elsewhere and what can NI teach other jurisdictions?

NI Policymakers have tried to learn lessons about encouraging spatial mobility by considering GB programmes primarily (and USA examples secondarily) with a view to adapting what seems to work to the NI context. This mode of policy generation by which ideas from one area are transposed to another sometimes without an awareness of the local context has been criticised elsewhere (PECK and THEODORE, 2001). Nevertheless, with appropriate caution and sensitivity, GB examples – because of the close institutional similarity – and USA examples – less so because of institutional and other differences – can throw some light on the tasks facing NI policymakers.

Official approaches to spatial mobility in NI are located in the UK context of employability. At the time of the research on mobility reported in this paper (2004-2005), the main means of improving spatial mobility in NI was through TIs. These came out of the Long-Term Unemployment and Employability Workforce and were designed to help those who were farthest from the labour market by increasing economic activity and employment rates and reducing benefit dependency. The pilot TIs were conceived as operating in problem areas and as such were not spatially generalised although the initiative, if rolled out, could apply to groups rather than areas. TIs have four main new elements (HETHERINGTON and MORROW, 2006): Job Assist Centres (JACs) which are based in the community to engage those who would not typically avail of Jobs and Benefits Offices; Stakeholders' Forums

which coordinate the local delivery of TIs; Employers' Forums which are an arena to provide information on employment opportunities; and Transitional Employment Programmes which provide work experience for those who have problems in getting work after completing New Deal. Mainstream schemes are enhanced within TIs. These include Essential Skills Incentives and Adviser Discretionary Funds under New Deal; Work Preparation Programme and Access to Work under the Disablement Advisory Service; and the Careers Service. Partnership working is central to the operation of TIs, as is local flexibility, since it is recognised that issues vary between areas and that what works in one place will not work in another.

It is within JACs that spatial mobility issues are considered. Personal mentoring and assistance with journeys have been used to get jobless people used to the idea of travelling; discretionary funds under New Deal can be used to break down spatial barriers to work; and further down the line public transport provision could be developed to meet labour market needs more closely. There has only yet been an interim evaluation of NI TIs (HETHERINGTON and MORROW, 2006) so final conclusions should not be drawn. TIs, however, appear a partial success although it is noteworthy that spatial mobility does not appear a particularly prominent feature of them despite earlier hopes.

Should policy develop further in NI there are clear external pointers as to what might be expected to work and what not. Increasing public transport provision might be problematic given experience elsewhere and the views about the labour market voiced by some of our respondents. Efforts, for example, have been made with demand-responsive public transport, for example, to link deprived areas in Merseyside to jobs in Deeside and in the West Midlands to enhance access to opportunities at Birmingham International Airport for

residents in deprived areas in the east of the conurbation (PTEG, 2005). Despite this, there are financial doubts about the long-term viability of this approach as well as questions about its flexibility. In response to such limitations there have been moves to increase access to private transport. As LUCAS (2004, 294) notes, "Lack of access to a car is itself one of the key defining factors of social exclusion. The statistical evidence suggests that car ownership is strongly associated with welfare-to-work transitions". Private transport initiatives have yet to be tried in NI despite the recognition of the importance of owning a vehicle noted earlier in the interview material. However, in GB we find initiatives offering assistance with motoring costs, car sharing support, (partial) funding for driving lessons. Further experience of these, and similar programs, might act as a future guide to NI policymakers. Programmes to overcome physical barriers such as transport can only go so far because of perceptual obstacles which mean that the full range of objective opportunities cannot be accessed (GREEN et al 2005; QUINN 1986). These perceptual barriers include fear; imperfect knowledge; lack of confidence or a mixture of all these and mean that some people do not even get to the stage of confronting physical obstacles.

One approach, starting to tackle perceptual barriers, is information provision. A general commitment, for example, has been made to encourage Jobcentre Plus staff to gain a greater knowledge of how the local transport system works and how accessible different employment sites are in order to help their clients overcome transport barriers and widen their job search horizons. At the individual level, personalised travel information schemes have been put in place in selected local areas in GB, as part of local travel plans, but, as yet, there is only limited experience of widespread schemes within the whole area of a public transport network. Travel advocacy goes a step further: it is about building confidence in using transport by providing enhanced assistance to job seekers through an individualised service at

'point of use', so encouraging people to make 'informed choices' 'in the round''. But to get off the ground, experience outside NI shows that such initiatives require the funding and support of several partners across different policy domains (WESTWOOD, 2004).

Recognition that perceptual barriers to work are often complex and inter-linked, such that dealing with one barrier may be insufficient, lies at the heart of other initiatives like personal development programmes which have been experimented with outside NI. These programmes are designed to deal with barriers holistically, in recognition of the fact that once one barrier is dealt with, another barrier that was previously hidden might emerge. Programmes of this type are not explicitly aimed at enhancing spatial mobility, but instead focus on confidence-building and raising awareness. They involve challenging assumptions/perceptions and self-imposed barriers in a holistic fashion by showing individuals that they are able to learn new skills. Typically, the 'travel' aspect is embedded in a broader programme (which may have a focus on sport or music in an attempt to engage participants) which aims to enhance confidence, self-esteem and 'broaden horizons' more generally. These would fit well within the remit of existing NI social policy which already has initiatives such as Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and the promotion of the spatial mobility of young people (HOUSE OF SPORT, 2005).

The example of NI offers lessons for policymakers in other jurisdictions primarily because demand-side policies of local job creation have been implemented here much more strongly than elsewhere in the UK. One conclusion is that there is considerable heterogeneity between companies and locations in the geographical and social impact of employment growth. NI policymakers sought a 'cook book' that would provide them with relatively clear indications of what would happen if an employer of a given type was located in an area of a certain kind.

It is possible to provide some scenarios, but the hope of a deterministic set of rules to estimate the spatial and labour market impact of jobs growth foundered on the contingent nature of local labour markets which means there is high place-to-place variability. It is likely that this will be the case elsewhere. The corollary of this, given the NI experience, is that careful local adaptation, ties with communities, and tailored recruitment and retention packages are necessary to make employment targeting a success – and that simply locating employment in or near an area with the expectation of forecasting the impact of this by means of readily-generalisable rules is unrealistic.

A second issue the NI example raises concerns spatial scale. As was seen in Table 1 there is diversity in the catchment sizes of the various employment sites as measured by the mean travel-to-work distance of workers. However, it is worthwhile noting that most of the catchments are 'small' in that they are less extensive than officially-designated TTWAs. This indicates that the appropriate spatial scale for the geographical targeting of jobs is the 'local' by which is meant something in the range of 0-20kms in most cases. Given spatially restricted employment catchments simply locating jobs within a TTWA is therefore likely to be inadequate, and that attention should be given to existing labour market spatial mobility patterns. This should not be surprising given some parts of the research literature. McQUAID (2006) identifies, for example, that differences in job accessibility *within* a TTWA was a significant predictor of successful transition to employment; furthermore, WEBSTER (1996) highlights the relatively short travel-to-work distances of urban residents. These support the contention that employment impacts are sometimes highly localised. The above comments do not seek to say that local jobs are not an important part of employability; presumably without this job creation more people would be jobless if it were possible to examine the counterfactual where they did not exist. However, it is reasonable to suggest

local job creation policies are not easy to devise given local contingencies, nor given these same contingencies, easy to measure in terms of their effectiveness.

A third issue identified which might have wider relevance is that the scope for attracting employment to localities through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) could be running out of steam if the NI example can be generalised. In NI, the apparent recent shortage of industrial FDI that can easily be brought to areas with high jobless counts, that has been identified by policymakers, has called into question the viability of spatial employment targeting as practised in the past. Increasingly, employment growth in NI is seen as being concentrated in sectors such as services which must often be located near their market. The lessons from this are twofold. Firstly, if local employment growth in designated areas is seen as being of key importance, then job creation through alternative means such as local entrepreneurship will assume greater significance both in NI and elsewhere. Employment generated by these means might have a greater local impact than that brought in by FDI, and this adds a further complication to debates about demand-led programmes – perhaps the ownership and nature of job creation could be important also. Secondly, worker spatial mobility might be seen as being desirable, elsewhere as in NI, because of declining prospects for bringing jobs to areas and workers. And in encouraging worker mobility, the emerging example of NI illustrates the problems of dealing with combined physical and perceptual barriers, of working with diverse age groups, and of coping with the theme of spatial mobility which cuts across many areas of government within current departmental structures.

The NI case shows that geographical employment targeting on its own is insufficient and that outreach to communities is necessary, sometimes through encouraging worker spatial

mobility, to get people into work. This tends very much to broader notions of employability that recognise labour demand (McQUAID and LINDSAY 2005) but also to significant supply-side action in demand-led programmes. This complexity perhaps explains the 'conflicting signals' observed by MORRISON (2005). Above all, the challenge now for policymakers is to ensure that a full armoury of policies is drawn upon rather than just one class of approach. Whether a 'jobs to workers' or 'workers to jobs' policy is appropriate varies from place to place and between different types of worker.

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Table 1: LRS workforce and site characteristics

Site	*Industrial Sector*	*Largest SOC Group*	*Percentage Jobless in workforce*	*Percentage jobless ward*	*Percentage jobless catchment*	*Mean commute (km)*	*Number*
Site 1 – Belfast	Engineering	SOC 5 – 51%	32.10	40	44	11.60	375
Site 2 – Belfast	Engineering	SOC 8 – 80%	67.60	47	46	9.82	379
Site 3 – Small town	Textiles	SOC 5 – 52%	46.90	37	49	7.17	535
Site 4 – Belfast	Electronics	SOC 8 – 52%	50.20	53	43	13.57	244
Site 5 – Small town	Assembly	SOC 8 – 97%	41.00	38	38	9.94	323
Site 6 – Small town	Pharmaceuticals	SOC 8 – 43%	22.20	30	39	15.78	598
Site 7 – Small town	Textiles	SOC 8 – 63%	42.00	40	46	11.02	320
Site 8 – Belfast	Electronics	SOC 8 – 71%	42.70	20	45	14.10	298
Site 9 – Rural	Textiles	SOC 8 – 87%	39.80	34	42	17.59	613
Site 10 – Rural	Textiles	SOC 8 – 84%	35.00	36	51	9.45	1018
Site 11 – Small town	Textiles	SOC 8 – 83%	40.50	38	43	9.27	966
Site 12 – Large town	Textiles	SOC 8 – 85%	22.80	53	52	4.03	656
Site 13 – Small town	Textiles	SOC 8 – 85%	35.60	53	44	13.31	618
Site 14 – Small town	Textiles	SOC 8 – 88%	37.10	33	39	9.23	415
Site 15 – Small town	Plastics	SOC 8 – 38%	30.60	23	37	8.27	294
Site 16 – Small town	Electronics	SOC 8 – 82%	22.70	38	44	25.60	752
Site 17 – Belfast	Callcentre	SOC 3 – 82%	7.90	31	41	26.55	143
Site 18 – Small town	Assembly	SOC 5 – 91%	38.90	35	34	15.57	2067
Site 19 – Small town	Food processing	SOC 5 – 61%	38.40	33	44	15.30	354
Site 20 – Belfast	Hotel	SOC 6 – 56%	21.80	25	44	11.60	712
Site 21 – Belfast	Callcentre	SOC 4 – 74%	22.80	18	42	20.20	574
Site 22 – Belfast	Software	SOC 2 – 81%	4.50	25	40	29.97	192
Site 23 – Belfast	Software	SOC 3 – 85%	21.80	63	41	23.06	390
Site 24 – Large town	Callcentre	SOC 3 – 64%	36.40	65	46	45.50	22

Source: LRS and Census of Population 2001

Key: SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) – 2: Professional occupations; 3: Associate professional & technical occupations; 4: Administrative & secretarial occupations; 5: Skilled trades occupations; 6: Personal service occupations; 8: Process, plant & machine operatives

Comment [AEG8]: Need to insert a key to SOC groups

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